DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 551 CS 509 750

AUTHOR Monsma, John W.
TITLE Putting the Family on the Tube: An Interactive Television Approach to Teaching Family Communication.
PUB DATE 1997-11-00
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (83rd, Chicago, IL, November 19-23, 1997).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Course Descriptions; *Distance Education; *Family Environment; *Family Relationship; Higher Education; Interactive Television; Lesson Plans; *Telecourses
IDENTIFIERS *Family Communication; *Northern Arizona University

ABSTRACT

The possibility of presenting a family communication course to large numbers of students and to students who cannot be present in the classroom makes interactive television a delivery mode worth considering. A family communication course was introduced experimentally at Northern Arizona University in Spring, 1983 and was designed around the concept of topical minicourses, each five weeks in length for one hour of credit. From the outset, family communication required a highly interactive format--question/answer, small group projects, discussion, and role play. The course developer resisted teaching the course using interactive television at first but agreed to a one-semester trial in Fall, 1995. The initial class included 80 students in a studio, 10 students in Yuma, 3 students in Holbrook, and 150 students viewing the course on cable or in another campus facility. Two class sessions demonstrated that the process worked well. Since that experiment, family communication has been offered each semester, exclusively on television, over 1,000 students have completed the course, in contrast to the 250 who could have enrolled in a standard classroom version. The course is taught using retrofitted classrooms or studios particularly designed for distance learning. Interactive television may require some modification of pedagogy--"talking heads" offer no motivation to students, especially those at remote sites. A sample lesson plan (demonstrating that families are a system) and a sample exercise redesigned for interactive television shows how developing interactive lesson plans in one of the most stimulating aspects of teaching on television. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 416 551

PUTTING THE FAMILY ON THE TUBE: AN INTERACTIVE TELEVISION APPROACH TO TEACHING FAMILY COMMUNICATION

John W. Monsma
Northern Arizona University

National Communication Association
Chicago, Illinois
1997

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Monsma
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 507750

PUTTING THE FAMILY ON THE TUBE: AN INTERACTIVE TELEVISION APPROACH TO TEACHING FAMILY COMMUNICATION

John W. Monsma
Northern Arizona University

Northern Arizona University is the national leader in utilizing interactive television as a vehicle for distance learning. Beginning with link to the NAU center in Yuma located on the campus of Arizona Western College (community college for Yuma County) in January, 1990, the system has expanded to 28 sites. These sites, located in nearly every area of the state, help to fulfill the mission of NAU to serve rural Arizona, a mission mandated by the Arizona Board of Regents. State supported higher education in Arizona is limited to three universities: Arizona State University (Tempe), University of Arizona (Tucson) and Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff). ASU and UA are located in the two major population centers; NAU is located in a community slightly in excess of 52,000. Since Arizona is a state with vast geographical distances and a growing multi-ethnic population, the task of making higher education available presents a genuine challenge. This task becomes even more significant when one considers that the average family income in Arizona falls below national norms and, consequently, many students--especially non-traditional students-cannot leave the work place to attend campus-based courses.

Interactive television classes are offered in addition to web based courses and to courses offered with a new web technology called streaming. Streaming is offered in asynchronous time and features a recorded audio/video, in the upper left of the monitor screen, of the instructor teaching the course. The remainder of the screen can be used by the student to call up a variety of materials from the class.

The author introduced Family Communication experimentally at NAU in Spring, 1983. Popularity and demand exceeded expectations and, thus, it became part of the regular curriculum within two years. The NAU course was deliberately designed around the concept of topical mini courses, each five weeks in length for one hour of credit. This design allowed the development of a summer seminar series with invited faculty presenting topics based on their expertise. Regular semester classes include: family of origin, husband/wife communication, and parent/child communication. Summer classes have considered communication in stepfamilies, effects of birthorder on communication, effects of stress on communication, communication in Hispanic families, and communication in Navajo families. The mini-course format permits a great deal of flexibility and functions effectively by allowing students to take the topics of greatest interest. Nevertheless, over 90% attend all three of the regular semester offerings.

The course in Family Communication functions as a core requirement for the Interpersonal/Family Communication track in Speech Communication. Offered as

either a standard 36 hour major (with a required minor) or as an extended 60 hour major (36-40 hours in speech and 20-24 hours from complementary disciplines), the Interpersonal/Family Communication track enrolls a significant number of majors. Speech Communication is housed in the School of Communication, a unit with 1400 majors including Speech Communication, Visual Communication, Photography, Merchandising, Journalism, Public Relations, Advertising, and Broadcasting.

From the outset, Family Communication required a highly interactive format. This included extensive use of question/answer, small group projects, discussion, and role play. Role plays proved especially motivating and thought-provoking if they concluded with extensive processing and analysis. Students found Family Communication exciting because they could make substantive contributions to the learning process and, at the same time, learn skills for personal relationships. One student stated: "This course is the only one I have taken which gives me hope that a quality marriage is possible."

Thus, when proponents of interactive television instruction approached the author with the request that he teach it on NAUNet (the official name for the distance education system), he refused out of concern for potential loss of interaction and personal contact with students. Not easily discouraged, the proponents continued pressuring. Finally, the author agreed to a one semester trial in Fall, 1995. The initial class included 80 students in the studio, 10 students in Yuma, 3 students in Holbrook, and 150 students viewing the course on cable or in another campus facility (they had access to the studio by telephone).

The first session opened with a variation of the Galvin/Brommel exercise in which two persons (male and female) are told to sit together in close physical proximity where they can touch each other and be comfortable for a long period of time. Additional persons are added with the same instructions; each addition necessitates adjustment to the configuration. One or two participants are then asked to leave, forcing the group to again adjust configuration. It soon becomes obvious to the class that a family is being formed and changed. Discussion follows relative to the nature of issues faced in formation and change; the exercise effectively demonstrates the complexity of contemporary families. Since this exercise requires persons to actually touch, it is impossible to have individuals from distant learning sites participate together. Instead, the instructor requested that a second group simultaneously be formed in Yuma, asked the Holbrook students to serve as the initial analysts, and invited cable viewers to call in their observations. Afterward, the studio students were drawn into the discussion. All students at all sites were encouraged to discuss ideas together. The process really worked!

The second session provided additional proof. Again adapting a Galvin/Brommel role play, the author instructed a simulated family to plan a vacation. The simulation included two parents and three children--each with strong opinions and vested interests. Persons at all sites participated; the only link was the television medium. The studio operator placed images of all "family members" on the monitors, allowing each

participant to see the entire "family" at the same time. The simulation worked so well that it seemed the television medium did not exist, and the dubious author became a firm believer that distance television instruction can be both personal and interactive.

Since that fall experiment, Family Communication has been offered each semester, exclusively on television. Over 1,000 students have completed the course, in contrast to the 250 which could have enrolled in a standard classroom version. Sessions have included as many as five sites, plus the studio and cable locations. Students consistently rate the class highly, including distance learning students who often comment about the quality of the interaction.

NAUNet utilizes five studios on the NAU campus; each distance site has a minimum of one studio. Each studio is equipped with a control room from which an operator controls the camera and audio equipment and blends the various feeds. The sites on the NAU campus consist of four retrofitted classrooms and a new fifth studio specifically designed for distance learning. Studios range from a capacity of 16 to 89 students. Each studio comes equipped with multiple large-screen monitors in front and in back for student viewing, additional small monitors in the instructional console for the teacher, a pad cam, MAC and IBM computers, both wireless and hard-wired microphones for the instructor, and a microphone for each student. Telephone calls from cable students are presented through the overhead speaker system. The operator can flash notice of an incoming call or other messages to the instructor from the monitors in the back or at the console.

The four retrofitted studios have fixed seating, necessitating the use of other areas in the studio for group activities. While presenting some difficulty, these studios can be adapted for interactive methodologies. The fifth studio offers state of the art equipment and maximum flexibility. Trapezoidal tables can be arranged into various arrangements, although a major change does require two hours advance notice to allow for moving the microphone wiring. The instructional console is mounted on wheels. The cameras can be guided by the operator or by an automatic tracking device worn by the instructor. Thus, the instructor can wear a wireless microphone, align students into work groups, go from place to place, and still be picked up by the cameras for the television audience. A cordless mouse allows easy changing of any visuals originating from the computers. While this is occurring, all students can still see each other on the monitors which are capable of displaying multiple sites by dividing the screen into quadrants.

In addition to the Family Communication course, the author has adapted a required performance course for education majors, Communication in the Classroom, to interactive television with positive results. Not all students may benefit equally, however. A recent study of the GPA of NAU students who take televised classes, and who are not in the studio sections, indicates that freshmen often do not do as well as sophomores and upper classmen. Hence, NAU no longer allows freshmen to enroll in the television sections of such courses, although they may be present in the studio section.

Interactive television instruction may require some modification of pedagogy. The "talking head" offers no motivation to students, especially those at the sites. Students need to be involved. The author has tried various efforts to maintain involvement.

1. Begin class with a question, role-play or other interactive activity.

2. Have each student place a large nameplate in front of him/herself. This allows students and the instructor to address each other by name. The nameplate works even in a large studio or when viewing a monitor.

3. When a student gives a response, ask the student to explain it or ask other students to comment on what was said.

4. Break students into discussion groups. A reporter then shares the group ideas with the entire class. Experiment with tying the site students together into one group, especially if only one or two students are present at a location. By cutting the studio class off from the feed, the discussion by the distant students is the one carried on television.

5. Design a role and request that a cable student call in and take one of the roles. This provides a new dimension. For example, the author has had a "wife" who just received the offer of a promotion which necessitated a geographical change, call her "husband" to discuss the issues.

6. If visuals are used, be certain that copies are faxed to the sites. This proved especially beneficial with the simulated lessons students presented in the Communication in the Classroom course.

7. Vary eye contact between the camera lens and the students in the studio. Addressing only the students in the studio creates an impression of remoteness to viewers.

8. Make an effort early in the course to direct questions to site students. A variation of this strategy can involve asking specific students in the cable section to call in with an answer.

9. Try to identify a student who can serve as a "sparkplug", an individual whose comments will motivate (sometimes irritate!) others to participate. It is especially helpful if such a person is at a distant site. Encourage that student to speak.

10. Generally, try to remove yourself as the central focus of the class.

Interactive television provides much opportunity for the creative generation of lesson plans and complementary exercises. The following are provided as examples of those which have worked effectively.

Sample lesson plan

Purpose: Demonstrate that families are a system

Open class with a role play

> A family is considering purchasing a new home. The current home contains 1400 square feet, two bathrooms, and is inadequate in size for the family: two parents, a daughter aged 16, a daughter aged 13, and a son, aged 11.
>
> The family has looked at a variety of homes and sits down to discuss the possible options. The parents are concerned with overall size, location, and condition of the prospective home. The son wishes only to have his own room and bath where his sisters "won't hog the place". The daughters also wish to have separate rooms and the 16 year old insists she have a personal bath so "I don't have to deal with the mess of my brother and sister."
>
> Assign the Satir behavior concepts to some of the participants: irrelevant, blaming, super reasonable, and placating.
>
> Allow the role play to proceed long enough for the personality types to emerge and affect the decision making process.
>
> Stop the role play and ask students to analyze what is happening.

Present generic characteristics of systems

Present system characteristics especially typical of families

Break students into groups. Ask each group to appoint a recorder. Each group is to discuss when and how they experienced system characteristics operative in their families and how such characteristics affected family functioning. (It may help to link distance sites with a low number of students together for this discussion.) Invite cable viewers to compile their own lists.

Reporters from the various groups present the findings. Invite cable students to call in their ideas. Write ideas on the pad cam or enter them into the computer so that the ideas may be displayed on the monitors.

Ask students to discuss the findings and to create summary generalizations.

Wrap up the session.

This sample lesson plan will allow students to experience learning in an inductive

form. While the lesson plan may seem not as efficient as traditional lecture, the experiences of participating in or viewing the role play and of immediate application of the system concepts to personal families of origin will clearly teach the point. In addition, the interactive discussions will generate added insight.

Sample Exercise

Gender Communication Differences

PURPOSE:

This exercise is adapted from a number of sources (Krupar, 1973). It is serves as an introductory exercise to a unit on gender communication differences and is intended to help the student face his/her prejudices and stereotypes in an atmosphere which hopefully will generate sensitivity and understanding.

METHODOLOGY:

1. Separate the male and female students into single-sex groups of approximately 5-7 persons. Have each group select one person to be the recorder of comments made which will later be presented to the entire class. It may be helpful to link together distance sites with few students.

2. Tell each group to list as many gripes against the opposite sex as they can. These gripes are then recorded for later presentation to the entire class. These gripes should be focused generically on men or women, not on a particular male or female.

3. Allow about 15-20 minutes for listing of the gripes.

4. Reassemble the class. The recorders read off the lists. The opposite sex is not allowed to argue the rightness or wrongness of the items listed. Stress that what is reported is a perception and that, regardless of the accuracy of the perception, it is reality to the individual. Allow questions which deal with how the perception was created or what contributes to its maintenance. Tell the students that the purpose of sharing the comments is to generate sensitivity and understanding of the impact of their forms and methods of communication on the opposite sex.

POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS:

1. Follow steps #1 and #2 above.

2. After each group has completed their lists, have the group review the list and select the 3 most significant gripes.

3. Have each group decide what behaviors the opposite sex could adopt which would lead to the elimination or lessening of the impact of the gripe.

4. Reassemble the class as in step #4 above and read the entire list of gripes. Then, have each group conclude with the re-reading of the three most significant gripes, but do not report the suggested behavior changes. Each sex records the most significant gripes listed by the opposite sex groups.

5. The male groups meet together to decide how best to modify their behaviors to resolve the most significant gripes of the female groups. The female groups do the same with the most significant gripes of the males.

6. Reassemble the entire class. Have each sex read off the lists of their most significant gripes and pause after each item for the opposite sex to suggest the proposed behavior modification. Compare that suggestion to the suggestion of the same sex group. Discuss reasons for similarities or non-similarities of suggestions.

This exercise works well to bring prejudice and stereotypes to the surface and to generate an atmosphere of desire to understand. It leaves the instructor in an excellent position to contrast perceptions based on experience with the findings of research.

The development of creative interactive lesson plans and role plays provides one of the most stimulating aspects of teaching on television. Observing the excitement of students as they participate and listen to their own insights certainly makes teaching rewarding for the instructor! Role plays are only one tool, however. Additional options include questions, discussion, provocative examples, and guest presentations. During the current semester for example, the director of the Coconino County Extension Service told of on-going publicly available programs for single parents and early teens, and a stepfather talked of the creative parenting concepts which won his family the 1995 *USA TODAY* first place award as the most creative family in America.

The writer of this paper has become an endorser of the possibility of quality, effective learning occurring through the medium of interactive television. While all courses may not be readily adaptable to this medium or, possibly should not be, Family Communication is one course which can flourish. Family Communication courses can develop insights of life-long significance. The possibility of presenting such concepts to larger numbers of students and to students who cannot be present in the classroom makes interactive television a delivery mode worth considering.